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STEPHEN KING THE STAND



American Nightmares

AGUIRRE-SACASA

PERKINS

MARTIN

MARVEL
LIMITED SERIES
5 of 5
PARENTAL ADVISORY

STEPHEN KING THE STAND

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PREVIOUSLY IN THE STAND...

Someone at the Project Blue government facility made a mistake. And now, the deadly flu-like virus "Captain Trips" has killed off 99% of the country's population.

The survivors are tasked with living in a world they no longer understand—and making sense of the evil, faceless man that stalks them in their nightmares. These haunted souls include:

Larry Underwood and his older, pill-popping paramour Rita Blakemoor...

Frannie Goldsmith and Harold Lauder, who have said goodbye to their hometown of Ogunquit, Maine...

Stu Redman, somewhat rejuvenated after his encounter with Glen Bateman...

And poor Nick Andros, who teeters between life and death, and good and evil, as an infection spreads through his body...



SHOYO, ARKANSAS.
NICK ANDROS.



Whose last thought before going to bed the previous night was that he would be dead by morning.

The bullet-graze down Nick's leg was infected, and the infection had spread through his entire body. (By the time he found and took some penicillin, it was too late. Like locking the barn door after the horse had been stolen.)

His leg was a throbbing, rotten tooth, and he had a fever. And his dreams...

He could hear
in his dreams...

Why don't
you speak? Why
do you just
shake your
head?

I can't
talk. I'm
mute.

But he was talking. And hearing things. A whole world that had been closed off to him.

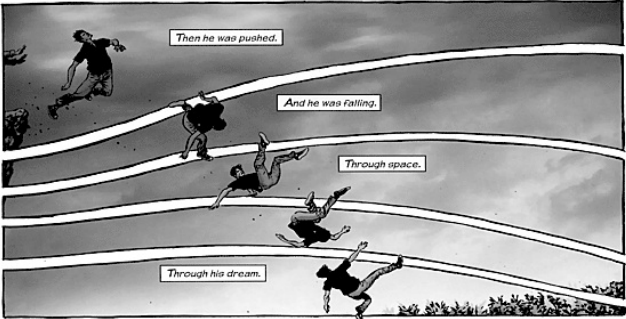
You can, if you want to. I can give you everything you see and hear--

--if you fall down on your knees and worship me.

Nick wanted so much. Women. Treasure. Power.

And most of all, to hear: The tick of a clock. The secret sound of rain. But--

No.



Then he was pushed.

And he was falling.

Through space.

Through his dream.



Until he landed in another dream, in a field of...corn?

And he could hear...music?
(Is that what music was?)



In this dream, Nick had never been happier. He followed an old voice (like dark leather) that was singing...

...I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear (filling or my ear)
Is the son of God - Christ - O and
And he walks with me and
Talks with me.



As Nick approached a ramshackle shack, he realized he knew where he was:

Polk County, Nebraska,
west of Omaha and a
little north of Osceola.

The home of...



...the oldest
woman in
America?

How you making
out with that
black man, boy?



He scares me.
I'm afraid--

Boy, you GOT to be afraid. Even a
tree at dusk, if you see it the right
way, you GOT to be afraid. We're
all mortal, praise God!

But how do I tell
him no? How do I--

How do you breathe? How do you dream? No one knows.
But you come see me. Anytime. Mother Abigail is what
they call me, I guess, and I still make m'own biscuit.

But how do I
get out of this?

God bless you, boy, no one ever does.
You just look up to the best and come
see Mother Abigail and bring your
friends. I be right--



--here, right here--

Nick woke up, in Shoyo,
and he'd never spoken,
never heard music,
but...

...HE was alive.



Somehow, the swelling
in his leg had gone down.
The ache had quieted
to a dull throb.

I'm...healing, he
thought. I'm...
going to be okay.



He limped to the door
and looked out at the
corse of Shoyo--

--and knew he would
have to leave today.

Where to go?



Well, dreams were just
dreams, but for a start
Nick supposed he would
go northwest...

Towards Nebraska.



**BENNINGTON, VERMONT
THE FOURTH OF JULY**

Rita was still asleep in the tent, but Larry Underwood was wide awake...



And urinating.



And looking down and marveling at the picture postcard New England town below him.

The only thing that made the picture subtly wrong was the lack of smoke from the mill.



No great loss, Larry might have thought--

--except it was Independence Day, and he was still an American.

Very much aware of the breeze on his naked body, Larry cleared his throat, found his pitch, and:

Oh! say can you see, by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hail'd, At the twilight's last gleaming...?



He sang it all the way through, then realized that the best way to start another year of independence in the good old U.S. of A. would be with a little bumping and grinding.

Ree-tah...

Yes, sir, he would wake her up in style this fine morning.

Larry Underwood,
Boy Patriot, wishes
you a very good--

*It hit him hard after the
fresh mountain air.*

*The sweet-sour
smell of vomit.*

Rita?

*All he could see--all
he had seen when he
woke up earlier--was
a fluff of Rita's hair.*

Rita,
you all
right?





A pill bottle rolled out
of one of her hands--



But Larry was staring into
Rita's dead face, her mouth
choked with the puke that
had strangled her...

(He stared at her for
what felt like a long
time, unable to move...)



Until the thought
erupted in his brain:

How long was I
sleeping with her
after she died?

That broke
his paralysis.

Ohmygod, he thought,
I was going back in
there to--to--



Afterwards, Larry realized he
felt relief that she'd died. That
he didn't have to take care
of her anymore.

Which, of course, confirmed
everything his mother had
ever said about him:

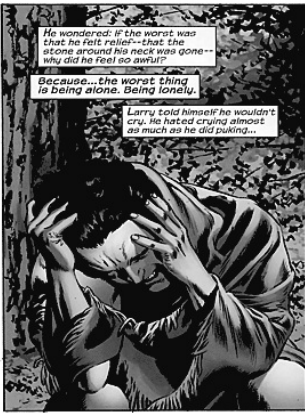
I ain't no
nice guy...



He wondered: If the worst was
that he felt relief--that the
stone around his neck was gone--
why did he feel so awful?

Because...the worst thing
is being alone. Being lonely.

Larry told himself he wouldn't
cry. He hated crying almost
as much as he did puking...



In the end, Larry had been chicken.
He hadn't been able to drag Rita
out of the tent and bury her.

He hadn't even wanted to
see her again. (Eyes averted,
he'd fished his things out of
the tent with a long stick--)

Though he had caught
one last glimpse of her,
staring back at him,
accusingly--

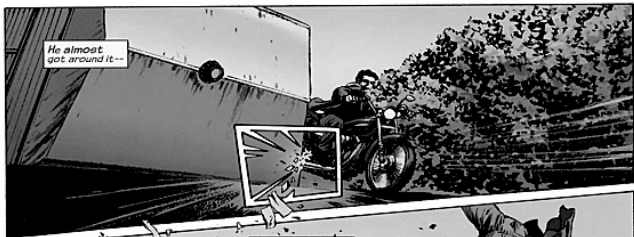
Shuddering, Larry risked a glance
back up to Twelve-Mile Point.
(He wanted to be away from
that tent, he wanted to make
sure he couldn't see it anymore.)

He couldn't, and that
was good, but Larry
took his eyes off
the road--

--and that was bad.

Oh,
sh--





He almost
got around it--

And that was that.



You all
right?

Larry asked himself.



yeah, I'm
all right...

But, he could
have fractured
his skull and lain
there in the
hot sun until
he died...



Or strangled to death
on his own puke like a certain
now-deceased friend of his...

Later, even wearing gloves and a helmet, Larry couldn't force himself to go faster than 25.

He realized, more than anything, that he wanted to live long enough to see another human face...



NEW HAMPSHIRE STUART REDMAN

Was eating his lunch, while Larry Underwood took his Fourth of July spill one state away.

He heard the sound of approaching engines before he saw them...



Two teenagers, it looked like, on a couple of Hondas.

Stu wondered if they would speed by him or stop--



And felt like he didn't want to risk it.



Hi!

They stopped.

I think he's all right, Harold...



Stu Redman, Frannie Goldsmith, and Harold Lauder:

Three dots which, when connected, would form a triangle whose exact shape could not yet be foreseen...

Where you headed?

What business is it of yours!

Harold! What kind of attitude is that? Mr. Redman's the first person we've seen!

Stu remembered something Bateman had said: "Give me three people and they'll form a society..."

It's all right. He's watching out for you, is all.

That's right, I am!

Funny, and I thought we were watching out for each other.

We're going to Stovington, Vermont. The disease center.

YOU...

...you're wasting your time.

I came from there and everyone's dead.

You're a liar!

Harold!

Stu told them an abridged version of the story that began with Campion crashing into Hapscomb's pump and ended with...well, him meeting them this fine day.



Afterwards:

I...I guess Harold and I owe you our thanks. You saved us a long trip with disappointment at the end.

Frannie, you mean you believe him? Just like that?



Why would he lie? For what gain?

Well, how do we know what he's got on his mind? Murder, could be. Or rape.

I don't trust him!



Fair enough, Stu thought, that makes us even.

Maybe you know something about it I don't?

I don't believe in rape myself.



Stop it, both of you!

Harold, my God, could you not be so awful?







Stu realized: Harold wasn't just jealous of him. His personal dignity was somehow wrapped up in it, too. He saw himself as the girl's protector.

Harold...

...are you sleeping with her?

None of your business!

I'll be plain: I'm not looking to take her away from you. I'm not here to squeeze you out like some bully at a country fair dance.

I...

I love her. She...doesn't love me, I know, but I'm speaking plainly, like you did.





Later, they ate an early supper
at a rest stop, off the side of
the road, in Twin Mountain.



And Stu found his
gaze was drawn
again and again to...



He liked the way the girl
looked, liked the way she
talked, liked her dark hair.



And that, friends, was the
beginning of Stu knowing that
he did want her, after all...

BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT.



11:20 PM.

~gasps~



There was something in the silence, Larry was sure of it.

Perhaps a person, perhaps a large and dangerous animal.



(Of course, a person could be dangerous, too...)



Is someone there? Who is it?

*Had a sound woken him?
Or had it just been--*

clap-clap-clap-clap-clap...

No, there was a sound!



CLUP-CLUP-CLUP-CLUP-CLUP...



If the night wasn't so cloudy,
the full moon would have
shown him...what? Who?

He didn't want to
know. He didn't
want to see.



But Larry could swear he heard the sound
of dusty bootheels clocking away from him,
moving west, fading...fading...



He felt a sudden
mad urge to stand
and shout--

Come back, whoever
you are! I don't care!

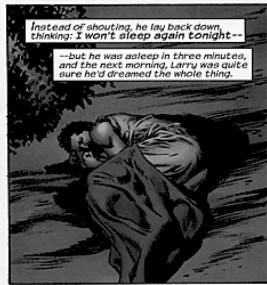


Then Larry thought, What if
those bootheels actually
PIP come for him?



Instead of shouting, he lay back down,
thinking: I won't sleep again tonight--

--but he was asleep in three minutes,
and the next morning, Larry was quite
sure he'd dreamed the whole thing.



OUTSIDE OKLAHOMA.

Nick made good time on his ten-speed. The evening of July fourth, he camped in a farmyard. Before bunking down, he watched a meteor shower scratch the night sky with cold white fire...

He thought it was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen...

And he thought: Whatever lay ahead...he was glad to be alive.



END.

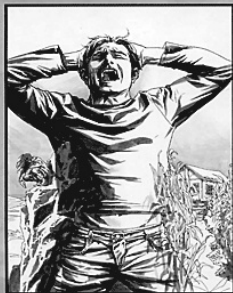
MONTAGE MADNESS

BY LEE BERMEJO

I HATE montages.

Every now and again, you find yourself in the position where you're forced to step outside your comfort zone with an image and you find that the new challenge makes you re-examine the way you do things. My general rule of thumb is that the simpler the image and composition, the better the cover. My personal tastes tend to push me towards fairly traditional images. I enjoy drawing 'moments', specific actions that call attention to a particular scene in the book, and almost all the previous covers for *The Stand* have been examples of this. In the case of this particular cover, though, I really felt the only solution to convey Nick's confusion would be some sort of montage.

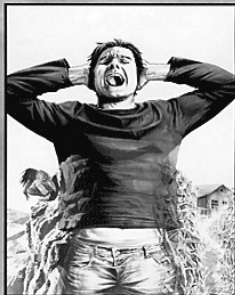
Aaaaarrggggggghhhhhh!!!!



ORIGINAL CONCEPT SKETCH

Getting into the sketches, it became pretty clear that I could pull off the effect through compositional tricks or I could try something a bit more complicated: overlap images at varying transparencies. The latter would require a pretty precise execution in order for the cover to remain clear. I did a sketch for both ideas and we wound up going for the overlapping image. These days, Photoshop coloring makes doing something like this MUCH easier but it usually comes with a very COLD result. I can always

tell when images drawn on different boards have been combined in the computer because the result is too... well just too 'precise'. It loses some of the organic feel that I strive for in my work. I LOVE the way painters like Drew Struzan pull off these sort of effects directly on the board so I decided to take a crack at coloring the cover myself.



FINAL BLACK & WHITE ART



FINAL COLOR ART

A quick note: when you're working with a colorist like Laura, you're working with the best of the best. In hindsight, I'm pretty positive Laura could have pulled this off just as good if not better than me. That said, this cover became a personal challenge. I just wanted to see if I could pull off the effect of transparency without making a complete mess of the color scheme. In the end, I was satisfied more with the exercise than with the final result. It forced me to step outside my comfort zone and try an image that was a bit more conceptual. More importantly, it opened up my mind a bit to trying more montages in the future.

I HATED montages....

MIKE PERKINS LOOKS BACK ON AMERICAN NIGHTMARES

A 5a.m. chat with Mike Horwitz

1. It's a funny coincidence that for this issue's covers both you and Lee opted to do a montage. And if I'm not mistaken the first time in the series that either of you have done so. Yet the covers use of the form couldn't be farther apart graphically or in terms of concept. Obviously you can chalk that up to the two of you being different artists...but what were some of the things that specifically compelled you to create this image?

I think, in this issue, we really start to see the opposing forces mustering their respective strengths - influencing their possible "disciples" - and that lends itself, starkly, to the split montage approach. I guess, with such a strong source material as the novel and Roberto's script, it may have seemed to both Lee and I that we had to take the illustration in this direction.



2. The second funny coincidence about the cover: you turned it in with your color notes for Laura and she said, even without reading the notes, that that's exactly what she was thinking of doing. You two have worked together for years now, beginning at CrossGen, correct? How long did it take for the two of you to develop that symbiosis? She's developed a style on this book that's specifically built around your art and your ink wash technique, much like she did with Olivier Coipel on *Thor*. How much of that was workshoped between the two of you?

It's probably just a natural thing - we don't put our heads together and dictate our creative control over each other. I leave Laura alone to do what she does best and very rarely will I correct her colors. Sometimes I'll see things in a very specific way and

Laura will accommodate that in any changes made. With the cover, again, we return to the juxtapositioning of the opposing forces and, seeing as we've established this moody, atmospheric red for Flagg it seemed logical to use the opposing blue for Mother Abigail. The white smoke and stripe behind Larry are purely design elements but also serve to make a direct distinction between the two. Truthfully, I would have been surprised if Laura hadn't seen the same colors to use as I did!

3. Were there references that you wanted to tie in from outside of the novel such as pop art or film poster art? In a way, Lee's cover reminded me of '70s book jacket art, whereas yours evokes that same era's movie poster art, something in the spirit of exploitation films or *STAR WARS*. Is that something you were at all consciously channeling?

Not consciously, no, but I DO love the design approach of a lot of the Sixties and Seventies media - be it film, novels or magazines. You can take a lot of influence from various sources and somehow - at sometime or another - it finds its way into your art.

4. You've said Saul Bass is an inspiration on your work, and in several of your cover sketches for previous issues you could see that. And there are instances within the series--particularly the Randall Flagg sequences--where you really cut loose and let us see that Bass-like extreme stylization. How do you balance that kind of heavy graphic symbolism with some of *The Stand's* demands for clear "acting"?



Yeah - I love the design approach to covers, although it's something I rarely get the opportunity to do on the series. The master of this in the comic scene is easily Dave Johnson - I could easily just stare at his covers for hours and try to figure out his thinking processes - but trying to get into Dave's head may be a particularly dangerous and hazardous endeavor!!

There are numerous dream sequences throughout the novel of *The Stand* and they lend themselves to this graphic symbolism more so than the "acting" - and any chance to stretch my wings a little is a good thing.

5. Speaking of acting, this issue is practically a master's class in "talking heads". I can imagine these types of sequences are dreaded by most artists...but you never fail to make these sequences AS cinematic or dynamic as the action sequences--or incredibly rich in mannerisms and postures. I'd imagine that capturing the range of figures and expressions you do would be impossible without live models to reference. If so, do you restrict how much you reference them before moving into the final composition to keep the art gestural and fresh? Do you have any rules for using models?

Talking heads pages can be difficult in the sense of keeping them interesting and, above all, keeping your audience interested. Alfred Hitchcock was a master at these kind of scenes and most of us can only hope to measure up to him in some small way. I think most of the "fresh gestures" you refer to come from the inking approach - where-by I will keep a steady flow going with the brush work and attempt to keep the movement in the figures. A little touch of dry brush on the shadows here and there keep them from being too static. As far as the use of models goes, well, every now and again - if there's a difficult shot, or a specific mannerism - I'll just take a quick shot with the digital camera and utilize that into the scene.

6. This issue has three leads: Nick, Stu and Larry. And for the majority of the issue you keep us within their subjectivity—everything they encounter is seen from a distance, except for three key moments: Abigail's eyes, Rita's corpse and Fran at the moment Stu falls for her. I forget the specificity of the shots called for by Roberto, but I can't help but feel your personal voice in these "man meets woman" episodes. Do you find you stage these types of scenes more freely than others? Or are they more challenging?

Most of those shots were just me riffing on Roberto's sensibilities in the script. He knows how to hit those character moments and it's very rare that I'll change how he sees the page. I may add a character beat here or there, adding another panel along the way - or change the direction of the panel movement - but otherwise Roberto knows his moments. It's always a challenge to convey the right emotion into a scene - a raised eyebrow can change the entire meaning of a sequence particularly in a moment of silence - and that's why it's so important at times to take that quick little snap with the camera.



SCRIPT TO FINAL

PAGE ONE.

PANEL ONE.

We're in Sheriff Baker's jail one last time. Night-time, cool blue. And we're looking down at Nick, asleep (fitfully) on his cot. He's just in his boxer shorts because he's burning up from heat—from a fever. He's sweating, tossing and turning in the moonlight, clearly in the throes of a nightmare. And we can see how one of his eyes (the one Booth gouged) is still swollen shut. Also, one of Nick's legs is swollen and inflamed. Grazed by the bullet (in issue Two), it has become infected, and we can almost see the blood-vessels beneath Nick's skin, red and raw.

FLOATING TEXT: SHOYO, ARKANSAS.

FLOATING TEXT: NICK ANDROS.

CAPTION: Whose last thought before going to bed was that he would be dead by morning.

CAPTION: The bullet-graze down Nick's leg was infected, and the infection had spread through his entire body. (By the time he found and took some penicillin, it was too late. Like locking the barn door after the horse had been stolen.)

CAPTION: His leg was a throbbing, rotten tooth, and he had a fever. And his dreams...

PANEL TWO.

Cut to: Nick's dream. And if the color palette in Panel One's predominantly blue, this one's red. The dream/nightmare red we've been using. A close-up on Nick's head, face. Behind him, almost whispering into Nick's ear, is the face of Randall Flagg, though it is (as always) dark and shadowy, so all we can really see are Flagg's eyes and smiling mouth.

CAPTION: He could hear in his dreams...

FLAGG: Why don't you speak? Why do you just shake your head?

PAGE ONE.

PANEL THREE.

A close-up on Nick's face, from the off-panel Flagg's point-of-view. Behind him, a red sky. And somehow...Nick's talking. And looks a little surprised/shocked to be talking.

NICK: I can't talk. I'm mute.

CAPTION: But he was talking. And hearing things. A whole world that had been closed off to him.



PAGE TWO.

PANEL ONE.

Pull back for this nice, big, dramatic panel. Nick is standing on top of a mountain—on the edge of a cliff, looking out over a valley. Standing behind Nick, like the proverbial Devil tempting Jesus, is Randall Flagg. Again, he is dark, faceless, shadowy. In his trademark denim. Gesturing towards the valley—the city in the valley—that stretches out before them. It looks like a kingdom. All for the taking—for Nick's taking, if he wants it. One hand on Nick's shoulder.

FLAGG: You can, if you want to. I can give you everything you see and hear—

FLAGG: —if you fall down on your knees and worship me.

PANEL TWO.

A close-up on Nick's face, transfixed by everything that's being presented to him. He could be a king, he's thinking—as, it should seem from his expression, he really considers Flagg's offer.

CAPTION: Nick wanted so much. Women. Treasure. Power. But most of all, he wanted to hear: The tick of a clock. The secret sound of rain. But—

PANEL THREE.

Staying on Nick, another close-up on him, but he's turned away from Flagg and closed his eyes, bracing himself for the worst.

NICK: No.



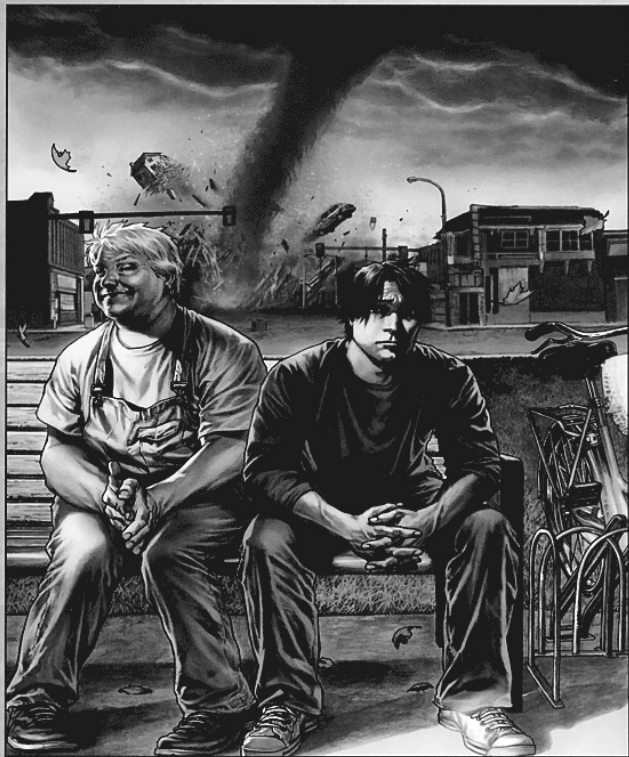
Mike Perkins issue #5 variant cover inks.



Here's a sneak peek at Mike Perkins' sinfully delicious variant cover for **THE STAND: SOUL SURVIVORS #1**! Nick Andros resisted the temptation of Randall Flagg...but can he survive Julie Lawry? Find out in October!



Next: Nick Andros and Tom Cullen:
Cosmic Joke or fellow Soul Survivors?



"Aguirre-Sacasa and Perkins bring King's story to life wonderfully, capturing the atmosphere of the story perfectly."
--David Wallace, comicsbulletin.com



The end is nigh as a deadly plague sweeps the nation and widespread panic overcomes the dying masses of America in a terrifying and inexorable tide. Who will be left to rebuild on the ruins of their past lives as the ancient rivalry of Good vs. Evil has only just begun?

Based on the popular apocalyptic novel by celebrated author Stephen King, *The Stand* brings together critically acclaimed writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa (*Sensational Spider-Man*, *Angel: Revelations*, HBO's *Big Love*) and the gritty visuals of artist Mike Perkins (*Captain America*) to tell a tale which begins at the end of the world.

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